



Shepard Accelerated Academy
District: St. Louis Public Schools
Enrollment: 290
Grade Range: PreK-5

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Shepard Accelerated E-Mints Academy at a Glance...

Shepard Accelerated E-Mints Academy is a school with a vision of mastery teaching, mastery learning, and mastery achievement. It is a place where old, worn-out teaching is replaced by new, innovative techniques, making a difference in the lives of each of its students. Shepard exudes a rich sense of history. Named for Elilhu H. Shepard, founder of the Missouri Historical Society, the school opened in 1905. The building is located at the eastern edge of the Cherokee Station area, adjacent to the nationally known Antique Row in St. Louis, Missouri. To the east of the school is an industrial area that includes a number of historic sites. The Shepard neighborhood is one in transition, with old historic buildings being renovated and new ones being constructed. There is a vision for this neighborhood that mirrors the vision inside the walls of Shepard school.

Shepard School's predominantly African American student population faces a number of challenges. Nearly all of Shepard's students receive free or reduced price lunches. Many of the employed parents work for minimum wage or at other jobs that don't provide income adequate to support a family securely. The student mobility rate is especially high – around 38 percent, and the number of homeless families is increasing. Many of Shepard's students come to the school working two grade levels or more behind their age group in reading and mathematics. The staff at Shepard shares a vision of creating a learning environment that will lead children to overcome these challenges and achieve their academic and personal goals.

Shepard Accelerated E-Mints Academy's mission: We envision a school where we celebrate mastery achievement, and where self-esteem, caring, and diversity are cherished attributes of the school, teachers, children, parents and the community as a whole.

Taking an Introspective Look at Teaching and Learning

The Shepard School staff believes that every student must have access to knowledge and must be prepared to make high-level decisions to live successfully within a multicultural society. Students must be able to apply their knowledge in order to positively impact their own well-being, their families, and their skills in reading and mathematics. In 2001, Shepard School students were falling significantly short of this goal. Forty-three percent of students scored in the bottom two levels on MAP communication arts assessments and 50 percent scored in the bottom two levels on mathematics assessments. Teachers and administrators began to reflect on their practices in light of the school's mission. Their introspection led to a decision to create new structures that allowed for dialogue, reflection and increased collaboration.

The school began to focus instruction on literacy and mathematics. As Shepard School staff reviewed their existing literacy instruction, they discovered that reading instruction did not meet individual students' needs; assessment did not guide instruction; teachers were not adequately prepared to teach reading and writing; and parents and community were not included in literacy goals. Consequently, Shepard designed a new approach to literacy instruction that would specifically address those issues. They created a professional development program to increase pre-service and practicing teachers' effectiveness in teaching reading. They implemented a school-wide assessment program to identify each child's strengths and challenges so that no child would be left behind. The school community established a cadre of literacy coaches to support instruction. A "Parent Nightly Reading Program" was implemented to encourage all parents to read with their children, and staff began to work collaboratively with Harris-Stowe University and community members to arrange individual tutoring for students.

Shepard School improved their instructional focus on mathematics, as well, by adopting new technology math modules, which motivated students to learn simple mathematical facts and number sense. Teachers, college mathematics instructors, and a mathematics consultant worked collaboratively to design lessons for students to apply their basic skills and knowledge to high-level thinking and problem solving activities.

"IN THEIR OWN WORDS..."

- **"It is our belief that caring is the catalyst for exemplary practice and cooperative environments."**
- **"We know that the social and emotional well-being of our students is quite connected to their academic growth."**
- **"It is through constant modeling and meaningful reinforcement of specific character education traits that our pupils begin intrinsically to change their behavior."**

Considering the Needs of the Whole Child

Because so many of Shepard School's families have difficulty meeting even the most basic needs of their children, and because the environment in which they live often devalues education, school staff are especially cognizant of meeting the needs of the whole child. To increase student attendance, the school implemented the "Be There" program. The program coordinator contacts the parents of each absent student to make sure the parent is aware of the child's absence and to find out why the child is absent. Students with perfect attendance are rewarded with pizza parties, Fun Friday events, and individual treats. The Care Team, which includes teachers, the counselor, a social worker, the nurse, the principal, and a psychologist, meets monthly on behalf of students and their families. A Student Study Team also meets monthly to address the needs of students whose challenges include more targeted academic or behavioral problems. Shepard's Parent Home Visit program helps teachers and families form real, working relationships to benefit student learning.

"GOLD STAR" PRACTICES

- **"A professional development activity known as 'The Conversation' brings Shepard staff, pre-service teachers, and college staff together every Wednesday afternoon at 1:30 to review research and improve pedagogical knowledge."**
- **The HOTS (higher order thinking skills) curriculum has introduced meta-cognition strategies into the Shepard School educational program.**
- **A yearly needs assessment given to students, parents and staff informs and supports the learning process**

With new unity of purpose, Shepard School has put in place structures and procedures which will build on the strengths of the staff, parents and community to improve student achievement.